

New York State Arsenal (Convention Hall)
(Naval Armory Building)
75 Woodbury Boulevard
Rochester
Monroe County
New York

HABS No. NY-6189

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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Page 1

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

NEW YORK STATE ARSENAL
(Convention Hall) (Naval Armory Building)

HABS No. NY-6189

Location: 75 Woodbury Boulevard. Bounded on the East side by Clinton Avenue; on the North side by Woodbury Boulevard; on the West side by St. Mary's Place and located in the city of Rochester, Monroe County, New York, 14607.

Present Owner: Conifer Stage Associates, 46 Prince Street, Rochester, New York, 14607.

Present Occupant: Genesee Valley Arts Foundation (also known as "GeVa Theatre").

Present Use: 1971 through March 28, 1985: Unoccupied; March 29, 1985: 500 Seat Professional Theatre.

Significance: From 1868 until 1907, the facility served as the home of the New York State Militia, the citizen soldiers of the 54th regiment. The regiment used the building as their drill hall, headquarters and arms storage depot.

In 1907 the city of Rochester converted the Arsenal into a Convention Hall, and until 1936 it served as the site for all major civic, charitable and cultural events occurring in the city. Political activities, public education forums and trade union organization efforts also took place at the Convention Hall. It was because of these events that this building was declared eligible for the National Register.

The 4,000 seat hall was large enough to support world famous musicians as well, and paved the way for the Rochester Orchestra and the Eastman School of Music. Without the Convention Hall it is questionable whether those institutions could have flourished. While the music affiliation may have had the most significant long lasting impact, the most notoriety stemmed from the buildings association with New York State politics. Two state conventions were held here along with numerous speeches from politicians, the most noteworthy of which was Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who is to have said that he received his "political initiation" at the 1910 State Democratic Convention. He came back 18 years later to receive his party's nomination for Governor and returned again 8 years later in 1936 as President of the United States.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of Erection: Started 1867, completed April 1, 1869
2. Architect: Andrew J. Warner, Rochester, New York
3. Original and subsequent Owners:

Circa 1860 - City of Rochester

Circa 1866 - State of New York

1905 - City of Rochester

1984 - Conifer Stage Associates, Rochester, N.Y.

4. Alterations and Additions:

1908 - Additions completed on East and West sides of building. Interior renovated. Architect was J. Foster Warner, Rochester, N.Y.

1909 - Major Addition completed on South side of building. Architect was Crandell, Warner and Stern.

1909-1934 - Various repairs and alterations by the City of Rochester.

1950 - Mansard and gable roofs removed, flat roof supported with steel trusses added. Major interior alterations. Architects were Henry A. Martin and Robert F. McGran.

1950-1977 - Various repairs and alterations. Architect reputed to be Walter Wiard, Rochester, N.Y., for portions of work, particularly in 1964.

1982 - Addition on South side of building was removed.

1984-1985 - Former stagehouse removed, new stagehouse added, major interior renovation, exterior brickwork and windows restored. Architect was Lawson, Knapp & Pulver Architects, Rochester, N.Y.

B. Historical Context:

1. Building names and tenants/occupants:

NEW YORK STATE ARSENAL (Convention Hall)
(Naval Armory Building)
HABS No. NY-6189 (Page 3)

1. Building names and tenants/occupants: (con't)

1869-1906 - New York State Arsenal (Armory) - Headquarters for the 54th Regiment of the New York State Militia.

1908-1936 - Convention Hall - City of Rochester.

1936-1949 - Social Welfare Department - (U.S.)

1950-1970 - Naval Reserve Training Center (Naval Armory).

1972-1974 - City of Rochester Center for Manpower Services.

1975-1984 - Unoccupied.

1985 - GeVa Theatre - Genesee Valley Arts Foundation, Inc.

2. Historical Events: During Convention Hall Period

a. William Jennings Bryan gave an address on April 17, 1908.

b. Caruso sang here on May 13, 1908.

c. During October 1908, the Democratic State Convention was held.

d. Governor Charles E. Hughes delivered an address here on October 23, 1908.

e. On October 31, 1908 an address was given by Judge William Howard Taft.

f. The Democratic State Convention, with Franklin Delano Roosevelt attending, was held here in September 1910.

g. On October 29, 1910 Theodore Roosevelt spoke here.

h. President Taft attended the G.A.R. Convention here on August 23, 1911.

i. During 1916 Paderewski gave a piano concert.

j. On November 24, 1921 Anna Pavlova danced here.

k. During October 1-3, 1928 the Democratic State Convention was held here and nominated Franklin Delano Roosevelt for Governor.

l. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt spoke here on October 17, 1936.

2. Historical Events: During Convention Hall Period (con't)
 - m. Woodrow Wilson and Alfred Landon spoke here.
 - n. Lectures were given by Arthur Conan Doyle, Sir Oliver Lodge and Horace Walpole.
 - o. Artists such as Mary Garden, John McCormick, Fritz Kreisler, Serge Rachmaninoff, Isadora Duncan, Jascha Heifetz, Arturo Toscanini and Pablo Casals have performed here.
 - p. The Rochester Orchestra, fore-runner to the Rochester Philharmonic, had its beginnings here.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The exterior has been renovated to approximately its 1908 condition, with two major exceptions: In 1950, the mansard roof(s) were removed (1949 photos), and during the current renovation the stagehouse (photos 1 through 17) was removed and replaced with a larger stagehouse.
2. Condition of Exterior: General condition is good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 118'-9" by 177'-1", 2 stories. Main section is 82'-0" by 177'-1", with 22'-0" from first floor to second floor, 9'-0" from basement to first floor, and 16'-6" from second floor to roof. Stagehouse wing (now removed) was 19'-7" by 77'-3". Wing on opposite side, formerly used as the main entrance, is 111'-11" by 17'-2".
2. Foundations: Main Section is 27" thick, composed of mortared rubble stone, with a 5" limestone watertable above grade. Stagehouse and former entrance wings are mortared rubble stone with cement plaster facing above grade. Main section has a 9'-0" basement. Stagehouse wing had a crawl space and the former entry wing has a slab on grade.
3. Walls: Main section has two wythes of 8 inch brick with a space between for a total of a 22" thickness. Both wings were constructed of solid 12 inch thick brick walls. All brick was laid in running bond. The exterior was originally stained and subsequently painted. The exterior corners of the main section are accented with limestone quoins. The narrow vertical windows have limestone sills and arched limestone tops.

B. Description of Exterior: (con't)

4. Structural system: Exterior masonry walls are load-bearing. Basement floor is slab on grade. First floor of Main Section is full 2 by 12 joists, framing bearing on interior timber beams spanning between masonry piers, with tongue and groove subfloor, with plywood on top. First floor of former entrance wing is slab on grade. First floor of stagehouse wing was 2 by 14 joists on timber beams. Second floor of main section is supported on the interior by steel beams resting on cast-iron columns filled with concrete. These columns formerly supported the balcony which was removed during the 1950 renovation. The 3 by 12 inch balcony stringers have been re-used as floor joists and a portion was changed to steel trusses in 1950. The second floor of the wings were plank and beam construction. The roof structure of the main section is 7 foot deep open web steel trusses which free-span the width of the building, with plywood on wood joists spanning between them. The roof structure of the stagehouse and former entry wing was tongue and groove deck on wood rafters.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Former 1950 aluminum entrance doors have been replaced with duranodic dark bronze doors and frames.
 - b. Windows: Windows in the main section are tall-narrow wood double-hung sash type. Windows in the wings were wood vertical "pivot" type windows and/or double-hung, with diamond muntins.
6. Roof:
 - a. All roofs are approximately flat with a slight pitch, and have been recovered with urethane foam insulation with a liquid applied polymer membrane.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans: Refer to enclosed plans.
2. Stairways: All existing stairways were removed during the recent renovation. The stairs in the stagehouse wing were of wood construction, with turned balusters.
Stairs in the former entry wing were steel pan type with treads filled with concrete. Railings were simple steel sections.

C. Description of Interior: (con't)

3. Flooring: Vinyl tile had been added in 1950 to all floors. During the recent renovation the major finish is carpet, with some vinyl tile and ceramic tile.
4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: Prior to the recent renovation, the interior of all areas was unadorned and spartan. The exterior walls had been plastered over. Interior walls were those added in 1950 and consist of wood studs and plywood paneling. During the Convention Hall era, there were no interior partitions except in the basement and stagehouse wing. Refer to 1928 interior photographs. The ceiling finish was predominantly plaster on suspended wood lath. All finishes were removed or covered up during the recent renovation.
5. Decorative Features and Trim: Although otherwise spartan, the stage area had ornate trim work. Much of the proscenium trim shown in the photo of the convention hall redecorating was removed in 1950.

This area has been removed as part of the stagehouse demolition. The pilasters and cornice on the curved wall have been salvaged and scheduled to be reinstalled on the back wall of the new stagehouse. The remaining proscenium trim was salvaged and has been reinstalled on either side of the new proscenium.
6. Current Finishes: The entire interior of the building has been renovated utilizing contemporary materials.
7. Mechanical equipment: None of the original heating, lighting and plumbing exist.
8. Original furnishings: None exist.
9. Site: The building is surrounded by streets on three sides. The main entrance faces North, with the Stagehouse wing on the West side and former entry wing on the East side. The major addition on the South side was removed in 1982 by the previous owner.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original Architectural Drawings: Drawings of the 1869 building do not exist. Scattered remnants of the 1908 renovation work exist in the City of Rochester Maps and Records Department. Construction documents of the 1950 renovation exist and are on micro-fiche.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION (con't)

B. Early Views: Copies of early photographs are enclosed, and were found in the Democrat and Chronicle archives, the City of Rochester Maps and Records Department, the Rochester Public Library and/or the files of the Rochester Landmark Society.

C. Bibliography:

Manuscript Sources

1. Official Papers

Construction Documents. City of Rochester Maps and Records Dept., Rochester, New York. Drawings of the New York State Arsenal Additions dated June 6, 1949. Valuable for information regarding changes made to the building at that time.

Democrat & Chronicle Archives, Rochester Newspaper, Rochester, New York. Valuable chiefly for dates and photographs of historic events that have taken place at the New York State Arsenal, now the GeVa Theatre.

Smith Papers. Rochester Dept. of Engineering, Rochester, New York. Correspondence from Patrick S. Smith, City Engineer to George Mensing, Director of Real Estate dated May 23, 1977. Valuable also for dates of historical events.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

A. Federal Agencies involved:

Urban Development Action Program, Department of Housing and Urban Development

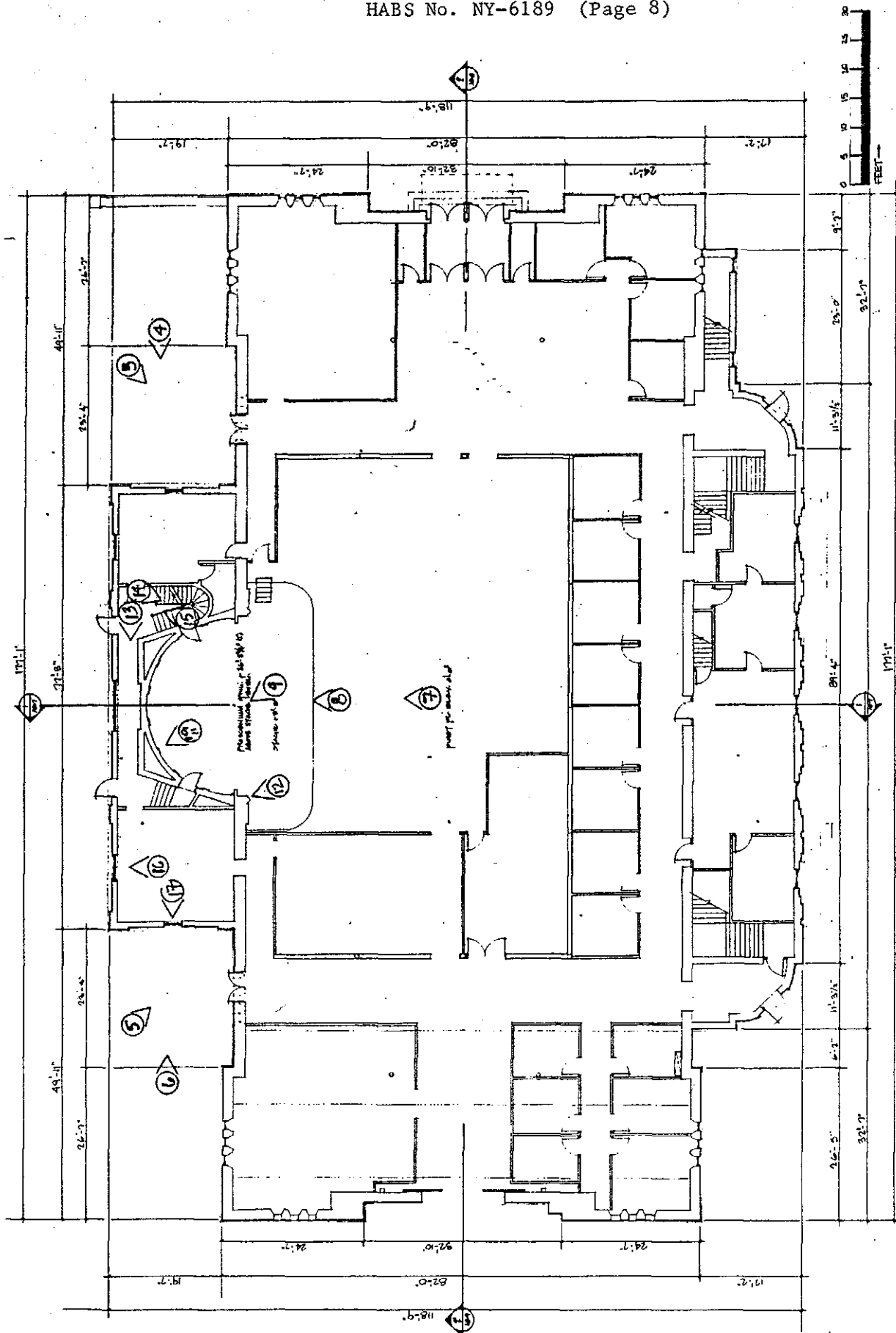
B. Name of Project causing alteration/demolition: GeVa Theatre - The project involves the demolition of the 1908 stagehouse addition, the addition of a new stagehouse, interior renovation and restoration of exterior windows and brickwork.

C. Dates Records were prepared:

1. As-built Drawings: June 1983

2. Stagehouse Photos: June 1984

C. Name of Preparer: William E. Pulver, A.I.A.
Lawson, Knapp & Pulver Architects
75 College Avenue, Rochester, N.Y. 14607
September 12, 1985



First Floor Plan - Existing Conditions
 1/10/10

2